

April 3, 2014

The Honorable Mark Pryor
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
Senate Dirksen Building, 184
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
Senate Dirksen Building, 190
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Blunt:

As the subcommittee begins its consideration of a Fiscal Year 2015 appropriation bill within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, I respectfully request support for the programs listed below. The funding requested for the national programs is to be spent at the agencies' discretion within the existing budget line and is not intended for any specific business, state, community or other entity.

1. Title: Geographically Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers

Program Description: This funding assists farmers and ranchers who are at a competitive disadvantage due to high transportation costs and geography by reimbursing producers for a portion of the transportation cost of their agricultural commodity, or transporting inputs used to produce an agricultural commodity during a fiscal year.

Fiscal Year 2014 Enacted: \$2 million

Fiscal Year 2015 President's Budget Request: \$0

Additional Amount Requested: +\$2 million

Rationale: The *Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008* authorized the Geographically Disadvantaged Farmers program. However this program did not receive funding in the President's Budget request. Congress has added \$2 million for this program in the last two years' appropriations.

Budget Account: Department of Agriculture, Supplemental Assistance

2. Title: High Energy Cost Grants

Program Description: Provides funding for energy and other rural development purposes in areas that have high energy costs.

Fiscal Year 2014 Enacted: \$10 million

Fiscal Year 2015 President's Budget Request: \$0

Additional Amount Requested: +\$18M

Rationale: The President's Budget request cuts the High Energy Cost Grant program which improves and provides energy generation, transmission and distribution facilities for communities with average home energy costs exceeding 275 percent of the national average. Grant funds may be used for on-grid and off-grid renewable energy projects, energy efficiency and energy conservation projects. Recognizing the significance of this program, Congress provided funding for this program in Fiscal Year 2012 in the amount of \$12 million and \$20 million in Fiscal Year 2013.

Budget Account: Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Services

3. Title: Mutual and Self-Help Housing Grants

Program Description: This program is authorized under section 523 of the Housing Act of 1949, as amended. Grants and contracts are made for the purpose of providing technical and supervisory assistance to groups of families to enable them to build their own homes through the mutual exchange of labor.

Fiscal Year 2014 Enacted: \$25 Million

Fiscal Year 2015 President's Budget Request: \$10 Million

Additional Amount Requested: +\$20 Million

Rationale: Rural housing needs are not currently being adequately met, and the Mutual Self-Help Housing Grant program helps make rural homes affordable by enabling future homeowners to work on homes themselves. This critical program allows families to invest "sweat equity" in the construction of their own home, thereby giving them a tangible stake in satisfying their own future housing needs.

Budget Account: Department of Agriculture, Rural Housing Service, Mutual and Self-Help Housing Grants

4. Title: Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

Fiscal Year 2014 Enacted: \$202.682 million

Support President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2015: \$208.7 million

Rationale: This program provides important funding for low-income pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and children, and the elderly, by supplementing their diets with nutritious commodity foods.

Budget Account: Department of Agriculture, Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, Commodity Assistance Program

5. Title: The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Storage and Distribution Funding

Fiscal Year 2014 Enacted: \$49.4 million

Fiscal Year 2015 President's Budget Request: \$49.4 million

Additional Amount Requested: \$50.6 million

Rationale: Request the Committee provides the fully authorized level of \$100 million for TEFAP storage and distribution funding. This funding assists food banks and emergency food agencies with high costs for storing and transporting food to those who need it. The President's requested level of \$49.4 million only covers 33 percent of storage and distribution costs. Such underfunding has resulted in food banks and agencies being unable to deliver meals to those who need them.

Budget Account: Department of Agriculture, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, Commodity Assistance Program, TEFAP

6. Title: Rural Water and Waste Disposal Program

Program Description: The Water and Waste Disposal program is authorized by sections 306, 306A, 309A, 306C, 306D, 306E, and 310B of the *Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act* (7 U.S.C. 1921 et seq., as amended). This program makes loans for water and waste development costs. Development loans are made to associations, including corporations operating on a nonprofit basis, municipalities and similar organizations, generally designated as public or quasi-public agencies, which propose projects for the development, storage, treatment, purification, and distribution of domestic water or the collection, treatment, or disposal of waste in rural areas.

Fiscal Year 2014 Enacted: \$462.371 million

Fiscal Year 2015 President's Budget Request: \$304 million

Additional Amount Requested: +\$75 million

Rationale: The Water and Waste Disposal program provides financing for rural communities to establish, expand or modernize water treatment and waste disposal facilities. These facilities provide safe drinking water and sanitary waste disposal for residential users, and help communities thrive by attracting new business. Additional funds are required to meet needs of communities and restore funding to historical levels. The program was funded at \$471 million in Fiscal Year 2012 and at \$495.7 million in Fiscal Year 2013.

Report Language: The Committee recommends \$66,500,000 for water and waste disposal systems grants for Native Americans, including Native Alaskans, the Colonias, and residents of Hawaiian Home Lands. The Committee recognizes the special needs and problems for delivery of basic services to these populations.

Budget Account: Department of Agriculture, Rural Utilities Services, Water and Waste Disposal Programs

Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Blunt

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Thank you for your consideration of these requests. Please do not hesitate to contact my staff members, Lindsay Kavanaugh or Mercedes Birdsall, at (202) 224-1924 if additional information is required.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Begich", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Begich
United States Senator